

Felix Fluke

Snow sprinkled the pine trees like powdered sugar. A highway slithered through crevices in the mountains. On the otherwise-still morning, a semitruck glided across the asphalt. Felix leaned into the passenger window of the truck, feeling the door press and release his torso with every winding turn. A mile marker caught his eye.

VOTSBORO

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His bony legs, clad in a pair of black jeans, both bobbed on the carpet. His gray, oversized hoodie swallowed his white t-shirt like a shadow. A fringe of emerald hair hung in his face.

“Can we, uh. . .” ventured the boy, avoiding eye contact with the trucker, “can we listen to music or something?”

“I’m more of a talk radio guy myself,” the driver responded.

“That’s fine,” said the kid. “I’ll take anything that’s not more silence.” The trucker flipped to a random AM station. There a fatherly voice consoled a frantic, teenaged voice.

“It’s about realizing who you are, Melanie,” instructed the man.

“And I know my status as a daughter,” Melanie answered, starting her statement with an *and* as if her words were the continuation of a half-formed thought, “but I *just* want to now God’s will for my life.”

“Are you sure about that?” the kid blurted out. In response, the trucker erupted into laughter. “I’m serious,” protested the young passenger. “Learning grand, heavy truths about life can make you a heavy-hearted person.” The trucker silenced the radio.

“What would you know about ‘heavy truths’?” The younger one answered with a shrug:

“I’m just old enough to know a thing or two.”

“Are you chummy with God then?”

“He’s a good boss,” the boy answered, triggering another round of chuckles from his driver. The older man questioned him further:

“What exactly is your mission from God?”

“To drift from place to place, spreading good fortune wherever I go and reminding people that God hasn’t given up on them—that’s my mission. Sometimes it’s the small strokes of good fortune that make all the difference, you know?”

His acquaintance only shook his head, suppressed another outburst, and focused on his wrestling match with the steering wheel. The road came to a head at a cracked, pothole-ridden intersection. The welcome sign for Votsboro glared at them from the other side of the street. The trucker parked next to a gas pump and fumbled for his credit card.

“Don’t waste your money here,” the kid told him. Placing his hand on the dashboard, Felix caused every needle in the truck’s instrument cluster to glow with an emerald hue. A faint gurgle filled the gas tanks under their feet as the gasoline needle climbed from E to F. “I’ll see you in Heaven someday,” he told the older man before grabbing his water canteen and venturing into Votsboro. He walked around the back of the gas station, drumming on each of the dumpsters with his still-glowing fingers as he went. “Good luck, dumpster divers.”

Felix trekked through parking lots and open fields. Locals squinted at the outsider while providing lip service in the form of polite greetings. Many heads turned to observe the green-haired kid marching down the shoulder of the town’s main boulevard. His feet eventually found their way into a thicket, where a maroon tool shed stood guard at the edge of the trees.

Spotting an outcropping of rocks behind the shed, Felix proceeded to tap them with his fingers. Several of them replied with the tiny thud of a struck stone, but one greeted him with the crisp *thwack* of plastic. He parted the plastic stone into halves; it split perfectly along a fissure. Inside lay a single key on a bed of packing foam. Felix gained access to the shed, slipped the key into his pocket, and contorted his arm to re-fasten the shed's padlock from the inside. Then, he allowed his fatigue to overtake him.

The young traveler awoke to the all-to-familiar sound of handheld thunder. A slender column of light streamed through the shed's newly-formed peephole. Outside, brass clinked against the coarse dirt, followed by a courtesy call:

"You've got ten seconds to get outta there!"

Felix's hands trembled as he unfastened the lock. He shoved the shed doors aside and burst over the threshold. A girl in flannel greeted him with a pistol in hand.

"What were you doing in our shed?"

"I don't want any trouble," he blurted out. "My name is Felix, and I'm just a drifter who needed a place to stay." She eyed him for a minute, clutching her weapon, until she found spotted the fake stone.

"You want to come inside for some breakfast, stranger?"

"Wait. Really?"

The boy used a soup spoon to shovel eggs, bacon, and hash browns into his maw. The girl ate a sandwich with one hand and kept her gun trained on the interloper with the other.

"So, Felix," she began, "how exactly did you know where to find the spare key to our shed?" Felix explained:

“My grandparents owned this land before your family did. They’re the ones who originally bought the shed and the lock.”

“You still got kin in town?”

“Not anymore. I’m the last one.”

“Why did you run away?”

“I was being chased by . . . by my natural predator.”



Seren’s hair, as red as the feathers of a cardinal, bowed to the will of his comb as he sculpted it into a classy side part. With the convenience store’s only bathroom occupied, he used the glass of the convenience store’s refrigerator to inspect his black nylon jacket, the maroon t-shirt that peeked through the unbuttoned top half of that jacket, and his black jeans.

“Hey, buddy!” yelled the cashier, “you gonna buy something or not?” Seren opened the fridge door and took out a four-pack of beer. Next to a plastic dish of pennies, a rack of bagged peanuts caught his eye.

“These any good?” he asked the employee.

“Honestly, bro, I’m allergic. It’s actually pretty bad.”

“Well, in *that* case,” Seren joked, playfully sliding the peanut display further away from the cash register.

“Nah, man. It’s all good as long as they stay in the bag.” He scanned the items’ barcodes.

“Anything else, sir?”

“Yes!” Seren pulled a photograph of Felix out of his pocket. “Have you seen this boy?”

The cashier glared at him.

“I don’t think I can tell you that,” the employee retorted. “Maybe he doesn’t want to be found.”

“He might not want it,” snapped Seren, “but his being found will be the best thing for him—for all of us.”

“Why don’t you just mind your business, OK?”

“Maybe you’re right,” murmured Seren.

He pretended to consider the advice for a second. Then he lobbed the bag of peanuts toward the cashier. A red blaze momentarily enveloped the bag, and it exploded into a cloud of peanut dust and shredded plastic. The cashier coughed and wheezed. He doubled over behind the counter.

“Hey!” a heavyset man hollered from the back of the store, “What kinda witchcraft was that?”

“The effective kind,” Seren replied coldly.

As the cashier’s limp form fell to the floor, the heavyset man brandished a butterfly knife. Seren casually picked a penny from the coin dish. The would-be vigilante charged. Seren tossed the penny like a miniature frisbee. The flying coin left a trail of red sparks in the air. It sailed at the perfect angle to slip in between the man’s lips and strike his uvula. He too started to gag. The knife dropped from his fingers. He started to stagger, securing himself against a store shelf. His forceful coughs caused his eyes to water. Seren grabbed two beer bottles, threw them in the air while walking down the store aisle, caught the bottles upside-down, and clubbed the man over the head with both of them. The bottles shattered, and the heavy man collapsed.

Seren noticed a set of SUV keys hanging from the man’s beltloop. “Well, friend,” he said, “I just treated you to some free drinks, so I’d say that you owe me a favor.” He picked up

the whole keyring. The wizard then turned around to retrieve his picture from the counter, but the photograph was gone. In the distance, he heard the store's backdoor slam.



“Kate, how many times have I told you that gas station bathrooms are nast—?” Felix’s captor had set down her sandwich to take a call on her cell phone. She continued to half-heartedly threaten him with the pistol as her friend screamed into her ear through the device. “Are you OK?!” she inquired. “You should be more care. . . a flame-headed wizard?” She repeated the phrase in an incredulous tone. Felix’s eyes widened. He attempted to stand up, but her eyes drilled into his with a *watch yourself* glare.

“Do you have it in front of you right now? Yes? Well, what, uh . . .” her gaze bounced from Felix to the house’s front window and back to Felix. “What does the boy in the picture look like—exactly?” After a pause, the girl swore. “We *need* to get to my car,” she ordered Felix.

“The cops found Kate hiding in a dumpster, ” the girl told Felix after the call had ended, “but the wizard kid was already gone.”

“I’m glad she’s safe,” Felix said.

“Yeah. Now let’s keep *ourselves* safe!” she exclaimed. “By the way, you can call me *Nancy*.” The car cruised along a dirt frontage road while Nancy and Felix got to know one another.

“Besides,” she said with a smirk, “it’s kinda hard to put a ring on a girl with no ring fingers!” Felix suddenly noticed Nancy’s hands—each having a thumb and only three fingers. “Is that your birth defect?” asked Felix. The woman nodded. “Yours?” “I’m a lucklet.” “A what” Nancy asked.

